

## A message from the Commissioner

Dear Legislator:

When I took office in January 2001, I promised to reach out to people of all viewpoints to help solve our most challenging natural resource issues. Working with people of all parties and viewpoints is the only way to come to real, lasting solutions.



During this first year, I am happy to say we have made good progress on this front.

We have worked with Republicans and Democrats, environmental interest groups, timber harvesters and concerned citizens.

Building these relationships has helped achieve three significant goals:

- Managing our forests as healthy, living mosaics that represent the diversity of ages and types of trees a healthy ecosystem needs to be sustainable long into the future.
- Finding solutions to challenging aquatic issues such as boaters who live aboard, the backlog of expired leases, building a strong, scientifically credible aquatic reserve program and making significant strides cleaning contaminated areas.
- Tackling the significant fiscal problems faced by the agency by flattening the organization, clearly defining the roles, authorities, and responsibilities to be more responsive and effective in our job.

Since becoming Commissioner of Public Lands, I have been pleased to find that many of the environmental choices we face are in fact false choices. As our understanding of ecosystems and forestry improves, the standard owls vs. schools argument is becoming a non-argument.

We manage trust lands to provide much-needed funding to build public schools and universities, and for other beneficiaries, such as counties and local library and fire districts. Providing funding from timber harvests and caring for ecosystem health, however, are not mutually exclusive. With DNR's 1997 Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP), we manage trust land forests to reflect the wide variety of ecosystems that countless native wildlife need to survive.

As we continue to manage this living mosaic, our forests will see important changes.

With the commitment to the Habitat Conservation Plan, Washington's state trust lands will have five times the amount of "old-growth" forests 50 years from now than they do today.

DNR fought a tough wildland fire season, with many of our staff setting aside their normal workload to fight fires and protect our natural resources. It was a terrific effort, and we have already begun re-planting forests that burned last summer.

We have also made important progress in managing the state's aquatic lands. We have spent many hours meeting with hundreds of people across Washington on the important issues of boaters who live aboard, aquatic reserves, geoduck harvesting, ending the backlog of aquatic leases and cleaning contaminated sediments.

On each of these issues, we worked with the public to receive their input and find solutions. And on each of these issues, we are closer to a long-term solution.

Finally, DNR faced a forecasted \$30 million shortfall, and I was very proud of the way our staff worked to find ways to run more efficiently while meeting the important responsibilities we have. We made some tough choices, but we are headed in the right direction. We continue to live up to those mandates, and we will share the positive results in future reports to the people of Washington.

With the help of the dedicated people at DNR, my first year has been smooth, and I have been impressed by their commitment to leaving a positive legacy for Washington.

I share that commitment, and this report highlights some of the work we have begun together.

  
**Doug Sutherland**  
COMMISSIONER OF PUBLIC LANDS